

5701
T. 6. 78
*The Plan of divine Revelation justified
in answer to the Objections of Unbe-
lievers.*

A
S E R M O N

Preached before the
UNIVERSITY of OXFORD,
At **CHRIST-CHURCH,**
On *Christmas-Day*, 1763.

By **JOHN RAWLINS, A. M.**
Of **CHRIST-CHURCH,**
Rector of *Hafelton* in *Glocestershire*, and Mi-
nister of *Badsey* and *Wickamford* in
Worcestershire.

O X F O R D,
Printed at the **THEATRE** for **JAMES FLETCHER**
in the *Turl*; and Sold by **J. FLETCHER** in *St. Paul's*
Church-Yard, London.

1868

Imprimatur,



J O. B R O W N E,

Vice-Can. Oxon.

Jan. 17. 1764.

P R E F A C E.

I*T may not be improper to acquaint the Reader, that the Authour's View in this Discourse, is to draw out a short Sketch of the divine Dispensations, to point out the Harmony and Connexion of the several Parts, and to answer the principal Arguments of Unbelievers, with as much Brevity, as is consistent with Order, Perspicuity and the Dignity and Importance of the Subject.*

A short Compendium, (tho' containing only the first Rudiments of reveal'd Religion, and vindicating them against the most prevailing and popular Objections,) may possibly be of some Benefit to the Younger Part of the University; It may gradually lead them to a more beautiful and comprehensive View of the Christian Scheme; and when good Principles of Faith and Virtue have once taken root, They may be enabled, by their

own

P R E F A C E.

own Endeavours, and the Assistance of divine Grace, to bring forth Fruit abundantly, to repel the Attacks of Unbelievers, and to defend the Truth, as it is in Jesus.

It is very observable, that the Enemies of our Religion are generally a kind of Retailers in small Ware: They distribute their Poison, like Quack Medicines, in little Vehicles, in Ironical Pamphlets, or in blasphemous Essays, the wanton Sallies of a vain Imagination.

A Reply therefore contain'd within the narrow Limits of a Sermon may possibly have its Use, like a Map to a Traveller, to direct to the most material Places, and to guard against the most dangerous Errors; or at least it may plead some excuse for the Authour's Attempt to bring the principal Matters in Dispute into one collective View, tho' They have been treated of more at large by much abler Hands.

JOHN XIV. 22. latter Part.

Lord! how is it, that Thou wilt manifest thyself unto Us, and not unto the World?

THERE are no Parts of Scripture more tender and affecting, nor more useful and instructive, than our Saviour's Discourses to his Disciples before his *Departure*. In this Chapter We find him administering Comfort to Them, and raising their drooping Spirits by a gracious *Promise* of eternal *Mansions* in Heaven, where He *was going to prepare a Place for Them.*^a

He answers their Doubts and Difficulties in the most affectionate Manner by presenting Himself before Them under that most amiable and inviting Character, as *the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*^b

He strengthens their Faith, and encourages their Hopes by the most solemn Assu-

a v. 2.

b v. 6.

A

rances,

rances, that their *Prayers will be heard*; ² that the *Holy Spirit will be speedily sent unto Them*; and that They shall be enabled, by the Influence of divine Power, to do *even greater Works*, than He *Himself had done*; but upon this, and only this Condition, that They *keep his Commandments*.

This is enjoined as the surest Evidence and Pledge of their *Love for Christ*, and the best Foundation of his *Love for Them*, and of that eminent Token of It, *his manifesting Himself unto Them*.

At this last Expression, *Judas*, not *Iscaiot*, not the *Betrayer* but the *true Disciple of Christ*, the *Brother of James*, was struck with *Admiration*; and, with a quick Interrogation expressive of the greatest Piety and Earnestness of Mind, He asks, *Lord! how it is, that Thou wilt manifest thyself unto Us, and not unto the World?* “How comes it to pass, “O Lord, that We shall be such happy and “distinguish’d Objects of thy Favour? How “is it, that Thou wilt exhibit to Us such “wonderful *Manifestations* of thy divine Will “above all the Children of Men?”

This was a natural Reflection, big with every Sentiment of Gratitude and Thankfulness for such extraordinary Condescensions of

his *Master's* Love. How much does It become Us, who enjoy the heavenly Light of the Gospel in its greatest Purity and Perfection, to imbibe the same Thought, and to express it with the same *Zeal* and *Ardency* of Affection !

But what a different Turn of Mind prevails among the Unbelievers of the present Age ! Because the *Revelations* of God are not equally communicated to all *Persons*, and in all *Ages*, This is represented as inconsistent with the moral Character of the Deity ; -- and it is confidently alledg'd, that no System of Religion, which is either *imperfect* in its Nature, or *partial* in its Administration, which is not granted *universally* to all Mankind, at full Length, and in all its Proportions, can possibly come from God.

It may not be improper therefore to clear this *Difficulty* ; in order to which, I shall

First, set before You a short View of the several Dispensations of God in the different Ages of the World ; Which will open the Way, in the

Second Place, for a proper Enquiry into the Objections of *Unbelievers*, with regard to the *Manner*, the *Time*, and *Effects* of the divine *Manifestations*.

From whence I shall make an Application of the whole to the Occasion of this Day's *Solemnity*.

First, Let Us take our View from the *Infancy* of the World. -- The divine *Manifestations* were coæval with the *Creation*. *Adam*, when He first came out of the forming Hand of his Maker, was impressed with evident Marks of the *divine Image*; His rational Faculties were strong and lively; The *Rays* of Heaven shone upon his Soul with the purest Lustre; and the *Communion* He had with the Deity could not but enlighten his Mind, and raise it to the Adoration of the first eternal Cause, the Author of his Existence, and of all the Blessings He enjoy'd.

But this *Scene* of Innocence and Happiness was soon chang'd: By *Disobedience* He fell; and by that *Fall*, the original Constitution of Nature was impair'd, and a fatal Door was open'd to Sin, Misery, and Death.

In this, tho' a dark and gloomy State, He was not utterly forsaken, nor left to wander up and down in the *Wilderness* of Life without the *Light of the divine Countenance*; but the Eye of *Providence*, which neither *slumbers* nor *sleeps*, was still over Him. The languishing Hopes of Nature were soon reviv'd
by

by the gracious Promise of a blessed Redeemer.

And, as a farther Support and Comfort, God was pleas'd to *manifest Himself* to the Sons of *Adam*, and to direct their Conduct by some useful positive *Institutions*. The *Sabbath* was enjoin'd, which *Philo* stiles the *Birth-day of the World*, and the *universal Festival of Mankind*:^a -- a wise *Memorial* of the Creation, and of the Honour due to the sacred Name of the great Creatour of Heaven and Earth.

Sacrifices likewise were appointed, both *expiatory* and *precatory*; -- and these were well adapted to the present Circumstances of Mankind. For, tho' the *external* Means of Religion, yet They carry'd in Them an *internal* Virtue and Efficacy; They were visible *Images* of Man's sinful Nature and Mortality; were usually accompany'd with the pious Oblations of the Soul, with Prayers, Praises and Thanksgivings; and, which was still an higher Consideration, They were a kind of *Prophecy*, or *Representation* of the one great *Sacrifice*, once offered for the Sins of the World.^b Neither in these early Ages were *Examples* wanting to animate Men in the

^a De Opif. Mun.

^b See Bp Sherlock on Prophecy. p. 86. Sermon. the 3d.

Practice of religious Duties -- The Character of *Seth* is amiable and excellent ; and his *Family* stand upon record as eminently distinguish'd for their Piety and Zeal ; and as such, They are emphatically call'd the *Sons*, or Servants of God.

We have indeed in Scripture, but a short Sketch of the first Rudiments of reveal'd Religion, but enough to shew Us, that *God* never *left Himself without Witness* ; that the first *Openings* of the divine Scheme were Anticipations of the future Kingdom of the *Messiah* ; and that *known unto God were all his Ways from the beginning of the World*.

After the *Flood*, the Face of earthly Things was chang'd ; there was, as it were, a new *Creation* ; but Religion still wore the same heavenly Aspect, the same beautiful Lineaments of moral Duty. The remarkable Prophecy of *Lamech* was now fulfill'd ; *God establish'd his Covenant with Noah* ; *the Curse was taken off the Ground*, and the temporal Blessings were restor'd as an Earnest and Pledge of better Things to follow. *

Nature was never touch'd with nicer Delicacy than in the History of the *Patriarchs* : The whole is related with a beautiful Plainness and Simplicity, and with the most so-

a See *Sherlock's* Dis. the 4th. p. 114.

lemn Air of *Truth* as well as *Antiquity*. The Vices and Imperfections, as well as the Virtues, of these eminent Worthies, are display'd in their full Light, without the least Indications of Prejudice, or any partial Attachments. In their whole Character and Conduct, the divine Providence interposes, directs their Counsels, and goes with Them, as their constant Guide, in the *long Journey* of their Lives : As Mankind encreas'd, so the divine Manifestations multiply'd; the Scheme open'd gradually, by Dreams, Visions, Prophecies, and the Appearance of *Angels*.

^a When we find these good and holy Men, *walking with God, entering into Covenant with Him*, supporting the Honour and Dignity of the *Priesthood, erecting Altars and Groves in high Places*, disclaiming the Practices of Idolatry, and spreading the Knowledge of Religion far and wide,--these illustrious Proofs of *Faith and Righteousness* demand our Reverence, and ought to fill us with every Sentiment of Love, Piety, and Admiration : But the most striking Circumstance of all, is, that divine Spirit of *Prophecy*, which enlighten'd their Minds, and enabled Them to see *the Promises afar off*; *They were perswaded*

^a See Dr. Chandler's Vindication of the History of the *Patriarchs* in answer to the Objections of the *moral Philosopher*.

of Them, and embrac'd Them, and confess'd, that They were Strangers and Pilgrims upon the Earth:^a Abraham, tho' at a Distance, rejoiced to see the Day of Christ, and He saw it and was glad;^b Neither was the last Scene of Jacob's Life attended with less remarkable Distinctions. -- In these critical Moments, He summon'd his Children together, sketch'd out the Characters and Fortunes of all the Tribes, limited the Descent of the blessed Seed to the Tribe of Judah; To Judah He consign'd the spiritual Blessing; and, with what a divine Glow of Soul, did He farther add, that the Sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a Lawgiver from between his Feet, until Shiloh come!^c

During this Period, indeed, there was no written Word of God; Tradition was the only means of Conveyance: But such was the Longævity of the Patriarchs, that It could not but secure an easy Passage for the divine Communications, especially those, which were relative to the *Messiah*, which were so often repeated, and with such wonderful Force and Energy of Expression: This was the grand Point, always first in View: -- The Plan is carry'd on with *Unity of Design*, and gathers Strength by Time.

a Heb. 11. 13.

b John 8. 56.

c Gen. 49. 10.

And,

And, if We advance forwards to the *Legation of Moses*, We shall find the same Harmony of Intention shining thro' all its Parts, tho' sometimes clouded and obscur'd by the thick Veil of Rites and Ceremonies.

But even these ritual Observances (tho' They had no inherent Beauty or Excellence in themselves) were adapted to the Genius and Circumstances of the *Jews*, were happily made choice of as a Guard against the Idolatrous Customs of the *Heathens*, and were many of Them very *significant Types* of the Messiah, and as such, are with great Propriety styl'd by the Apostle, the *Shadows and Figures of good Things to come.*^a

With regard to the prior Revelations of God, how many of the Patriarchal Laws and Ordinances were still retain'd in force! The *Worship* of the *same God*, the Observance of the *Sabbath*, *Circumcision*, the *abstaining from Blood*, and indeed the whole Pandect of moral Duties were adopted into the Jewish System: -- And with respect to the future Kingdom of the *Messiah*, what was the whole Frame and Constitution of the Law of *Moses*? not a carnal and *worldly Scheme of Policy*, (as is insinuated by a *late Writer*^b) but a

^a Heb. 10. 1.

^b The moral Philosopher, V. 3. *passim*.

wise Institution leading, as by the *Hand*, to the spiritual Blessings of the Gospel. -- It was a *Schoolmaster to bring Men unto Christ*.^a

Between the Founders of both Covenants, what strong Lines of Resemblance appear'd ! In what a Variety of Instances have *Eusebius*,^b and some modern *Writers*,^c trac'd the Similitude between *Moses* and *Christ* ! not only, as *Prophets like to each other*, but in almost all the Circumstances of their Lives, corresponding together with such a surprising *Analogy*, as was never known to exist in two other Persons. --- Such striking Likenesses could not be the Effects of *Chance*, nor can They be consider'd with any Shew of Reason, as the vain Fictions of fruitful Imagination. -- They certainly carry in Them the same *Stamp* and *Impress* of divine Providence.

In the whole Texture of reveal'd Religion, there is an even and regular *Consistence* ; many of the Patriarchal *Prophecies* had their Completion under the Law ; and many of the Jewish *Predictions* were fulfill'd under the Gospel. -- As in the Works of *Nature*, so in the Works of *Grace*, there may be some seeming *Discordances*, and it may be difficult

^a Gal. 3. 24 —

^b *Euseb.* Demonst. Evangel. Lib. 3. Cap. 2.

^c See Dr. *Newton's* Diss. on Proph. V. 1. p. 167, and *Jortin's* Remarks on Ecclesiastical History, Vol. 1. p. 203.

to trace the *Reference*, which one single Part may bear to another ; but in the whole System, if consider'd together, there is such a well-connected *Symmetry*, as greatly illustrates and casts a Beauty over the whole Oeconomy.

Towards the Conclusion of the *Jewish Ritual*, We see it gradually *spiritualize*, as it were, and refine itself into a more pure and sublime System of moral Duties. -- These, as the *Hebrews* call them, were the *Statutes of the Heart* ; and the nearer the Prophets come to the Kingdom of the *Messiah*, the more the *Sacred Fire* kindles in their Breasts. -- Lo ! *This is our God*, says the Prophet, *We have waited for Him, and He will save Us ; This is the Lord, We have waited for Him ; We will be glad and rejoice in his Salvation.* * The Reduplication of the Words denotes the greatest Vehemence of *Desire* and *Expectation*, and would be thought in a profane Writer to carry in it the most elegant Propriety.

We come now as by easy Steps to the everlasting Gospel of Christ, the End, the Glory and Perfection of all : The *Law* was given by *Moses*, but *Grace* and *Truth* came by *Jesus Christ* : Now the *Sacrifice* and the *Ob-lation* cease, and give way to a better Cove-

a H. 25. 6.

nant, established upon better Promises: ' The great Mystery of Godliness, the Mystery, which was hid from Ages and Generations, is now made manifest to the Saints. ' The Partition wall is taken down; The Gentiles are called in; The Poor have the Gospel preached unto Them, that pure and heavenly Gospel, which strengthens the Ties of Nature, sweetens the Affections, inspires every virtuous Sentiment, and recommends every Principle of Godliness and Honesty, which can adorn, refine, or dignify human Nature. --- It is enforc'd by all the Motives; which can induce a rational Creature to receive It, and supported by all the Evidences of Truth, which can stamp Conviction upon impartial and unprejudic'd Minds.

The Laws of Nature yielded a ready Subjection to the *Scepter* of our Lord, and the Commands of his Apostles; The *Winds and Seas* were hush'd into *Obedience*, and the *Dead* were instantly called into Life. And all the *Predictions* of the Prophets, descriptive of the *Messiah*, were truly fulfill'd in Christ, even in their nicest and minutest Circumstances.--To mention only one Instance--*Unto Us a Child is born, says the Prophet, Unto Us a Son is given, and the Government shall be*

a Heb. 8. 6.

b Col. 1. 26—

upon his Shoulder, and his Name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, of the Encrease of whose Government there shall be no End. • What a compleat Delineation is this of the blessed Jesus, the great Authour and Finisher of Man's Redemption? One would think, that the Prophet *in reality beheld his Glory, and saw Him, as He was, even Face to Face.*

Do We therefore make void the Law thro' Faith? God forbid, says the Apostle, Yea! We establish the Law.^b

This brief Survey of the several Dispensations of God, tho' given at *sundry Times* and in *diverse Manners*, is sufficient to shew the wonderful Harmony and Connexion of reveal'd Religion in all its different Branches.-- Consider the several Systems apart without any Dependance one upon another, and like the loose *Materials* of a Building, They may seem in the Eyes of some to discover no Marks of Beauty, Wisdom, or Proportion; But place them together with their proper Aptitudes, and in their just Combinations, and They will appear in a higher Point of View, worthy of God the supreme Architect of all Things, grand in *Design* and in all

^a 11. 9. 6.

^b Rom. 3. 31.

their

their several Compartments, *the Apostles and Prophets* being *the Foundation*, and *Jesus Christ* the chief *Corner-stone*; and the whole *Building* so uniform and *fitly framed together*, that it *groweth into an holy Temple in the Lord.*^a

Let Unbelievers place the divine *Manifestations* in this collective Light, comparing *spiritual Things with spiritual*, and They would soon behold the *Folly* of their own Reasonings, and be so far from reproaching reveal'd Religion, as a confus'd and *incoherent Jumble of Doctrines*, that (if not blinded by the strongest Prejudices) They could not but admire its Order and Regularity, moving on its divine *Sphere*, with one continu'd Direction towards the Glory of God and the Happiness of Mankind.

These Considerations open the Way in the *Second Place*, for a proper Enquiry into the Objections of *Unbelievers*, with regard to the *Manner*, the *Time*, and *Effects* of the divine *Manifestations*.

The *Manner* of the divine *Manifestations* is a favourite Topick of Declamation among the Enemies of reveal'd Religion. -- In their affected Strains of *Rhetorick*, They are apt to ask Us, "Why has God *manifested his Will* in

^a Ep. 2. 21.

“such different Ways and in such unequal Proportions? Is He not the *universal Parent* of all the Children of Men? Is it reasonable to think, that a good and gracious God would reveal Himself, as it were, *grudgingly, little by little, as a certain Writer expresses it, here a Bit and there a Bit?*”^a and that too to one favourite Nation only; Would not such a Procedure be partial, unjust and arbitrary?

But does it become Man to prescribe Laws to his Maker? *Who has known the Mind of the Lord?* or *Who has been his Counsellor?* *His Judgments are a great Deep.* -- He may have Mercy, upon whom He will have Mercy, and Compassion, upon whom He will have Compassion.^b

But says the *Infidel*, He is no *Respecter of Persons*, and He cannot act inconsistently with his *moral* and *eternal* Perfections. Thus far We readily join *Issue* with Him; but here lies the *Mistake*. -- The *Granting* a Revelation is no Claim of *Right* in Man, but a pure Act of *Mercy* in God; He may communicate his Will, to Whom and in what Manner his own infinite Wisdom thinks proper.

^a See Christianity as old as the Creation. p. 393, 394.

^b Rom. 9. 15.

Indeed

Indeed there might be some Force in the Reasoning of Unbelievers, if all Mankind were to be judg'd by the same Rule or Standard of Action. --- If *They*, that *gathered much*, and *They*, that *gathered little*, If *They*, that had the Means of *Grace* vouchsafed unto Them, and *They*, that *sat* unavoidably in *Darkness*, were equally accountable to the great *Judge* and *Searcher* of Hearts, without any Regard to their respective Powers or Opportunities of acting.

But God is not a *hard and unreasonable Master* requiring *Bricks*, where He has not given *Straw*. -- His infinite Goodness was such, that He *wink'd at the Time of Ignorance*; and we are assur'd, that *They*, that are without *Law*, shall be judg'd without *Law*. -- The strictest Notions We can form of *Justice* do not imply, that all Men shall enjoy the same *Talents*, but that all shall be rewarded or punished according to their Use or Abuse of those *Gifts*, which are committed unto Them.

It is the common Practice of Unbelievers to lay down *general Principles*, and from thence to draw erroneous *Conclusions* without a Regard to the Nature and Circumstances of those Things, to which their particular

a Acts 17. 30.

Applica-

Applications are made. -- This is evident in the present Case : They assert the *universal Benevolence* of the Deity, and from thence They would infer, that all Mankind have an *equal Right* to be Partakers of the divine Love. -- The *Antecedent* indeed is true. -- The *Benevolence* of the supreme Being is undeniable. -- But no Man has a *Right* to challenge that to Himself, which is the free and unmerited *Gift* of God -- as St. Paul argues, *Hath not the Potter power over the Clay to make one Vessel unto Honour, and another unto Dishonour ?* The least Mercies are greater than We deserve ; and to appropriate to ourselves an equal Proportion of divine Favour, as a Matter of *Justice*, is the height of Arrogance and Presumption. -- It bears as hard against natural as reveal'd Religion, and tends to *unhinge* the whole Constitution of Providence. -- Do we not find an unequal Distribution in all the *temporal* Blessings of Life ? and why not in Things of a *spiritual* Nature ? shall the One be consistent with the moral Character of the Deity ? and shall the Other be made to support a *heavy Charge*, of *Partiality*, *Capriciousness* and *Injustice* ?

Tho', as it is express'd in the Book of *Job*,
God giveth not account of any of his Matters,

a Rom. 9. 27.

C

yet

yet we are assur'd that the *Judge of all the Earth will do what is right*; and We have no more Reason to impeach his Righteousness, because the *Beams of heavenly Truth* do not shine upon *all* with equal Lustre, than because *Gibeon's Fleece was water'd with the Dew of Heaven, while all the Ground beside was dry.*^a

But these Objectors call the *Wisdom*, as well as the Justice and Benignity of God, in question: As tho' all Things were to be tried at the dread *Tribunal* of their Reason. "Why, say They, were the *Israelites*, a poor "mean and contemptible Race, in a little Corner of the World, made choice of above all "the Nations of the Earth? Why were They "thought worthy above all others to have "the sacred Oracles committed to them with "wonderful Distinctions of the divine Favour?"

But might We not retort the *Question* upon Them? Why might not the *sacred Deposit* be entrusted to the *Jews* as well as to any other People? The Reason given by *Moses* is certainly just, and ought to have its weight. -- God chose their Seed, because He

^a Judges 6. 37.

loved *their Fathers*.^a The divine Promise was made to *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*. What an Out-cry therefore would Unbelievers have made, if the *Blessing* had center'd in any other *Families* upon Earth? But waving this Consideration, as being perhaps of such a Nature, as will have no Influence upon prejudic'd Minds, let Us consider their Objections in their full Force.

They tell Us, that the *Jews* were a little *inconsiderable People, ignorant and barbarous*.^b It is true, that in outward *Grandeur and Splendor*, They were inferiour to some of the neighbouring Nations; and, perhaps, in *Arts and Sciences*, not so eminently distinguish'd: But, the less the *Instruments* of divine Providence, the less Grounds there must be for the Suspicion of *Fraud and Imposture*; and the more the Power and Glory of God must be display'd in bringing about the greatest and most wonderful Designs by means so vastly inadequate to the Effects -- tho', as a certain Writer expresses it, the Jews were not

^a Deut. 4. 37. and again Deut. 7. 7, 8. *The Lord did not set his Love upon You nor choose You, because Ye were more in Number than any People (for Ye were the fewest of all People.)*

But because the Lord loved You, and because He would keep the Oath, which He had sworn unto your Fathers, bath the Lord brought You out with a mighty Hand, and redeemed You out of the House of Bondmen, from the Hand of Pharaoh King of Egypt.

^b See Lord Bolingbroke. Vol. the 3d. p. 283.

arriv'd at the *Manhood of Philosophy*, yet *Out of the Mouths of Babes and Sucklings God hath ordained Strength.*^a

But it is urg'd, that the Jews were a *perverse and stiff-necked People*, ever *revolting* from, and *disobeying* the Laws of God. This, it must be own'd, was too much their Character; but compare them with other *Nations*; Were They more than others immers'd in the dark Abyfs of *Polytheism* and *Idolatry*? So far from it, the Knowledge and Worship of the *one God*, the sole Creatour and Governour of the World, was the *grand Characteristick* of the Jews, the *peculiar Mark of Difference*, which separated them from the Nations round about them. -- It was indeed their frequent Cry, "*Let Us go down into Egypt,*" This was their favourite Passion, but They were not such an *Egyptianiz'd People*, as the *moral Philosopher* represents them; The Worship of the true God was never totally lost among them, their *Revoltings* were never universal, and never of any lasting Continuance.

We are likewise told, that They were shut up in a little *Corner of the Earth*, and therefore not so likely to propagate the *divine Oracles* in the World: But for this great End,

^a Pf. 8. 2.

their

their Situation certainly was extremely *advantageous*, in the Center of the known World, between *Egypt* and *Arabia* on the one Hand, and *Syria*, *Chaldæa* and *Assyria* on the other, and in the *Neighbourhood* of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, the most noted *Emporiums* of that Age.

Lastly, it is objected, that the Jews were kept as a *distinct People* from the rest of Mankind. -- A *distinct People* they were, and the more likely to preserve the Knowledge of God pure and entire. -- For They were not so *sequester'd* from the World, as to have no Commerce nor Intercourse with their Neighbours. -- They were always desirous of admitting *Profelytes*, who in the Times of *Solomon* amounted to no less than *one hundred and fifty three thousand and six hundred.*^a

I shall only observe, that *their Fame* gradually spread and diffus'd itself among the *Nations*; their several *Victories* and *Overthrows*, their *Dispersions* and *Captivities*, and all the various *Revolutions* of Fortune, which befell them, did in a surprising Manner tend to the Conversion of the Gentiles, and the *Promulgation* of the Laws of God throughout the several Kingdoms of the Earth.

^a 2 Chron. 2. 17, 18.

The View, which We have here given of reveal'd Religion, and of the Way, in which it was *manifested* to Mankind, is sufficient to shew, that it was a grand and regular *Plan*, a *Progressive System* going on by gentle Degrees to *Perfection*, like a *River*, encreasing in its *Progress*, All lost and swallow'd up in the vast and unbounded *Ocean* of divine Love. -- In all its several Stages, it kept pace with the Wants and Exigencies of those, to whom it was given. -- It was truly adapted to the first and simple Ages of the World; to the Occasions of the *Patriarchs*; to the temporary Circumstances of the Jews, till at last it extended its Branches far and wide, its *Sound went into all the Earth*, and its *Words unto the End of the World*.^a

And indeed We are not only to admire the Beauty of this *Progression* so regular and consistent in its several Appointments, but to consider it as an additional Strength to the *Evidence* of reveal'd Religion: That *Chain* of Providence, which is carry'd on thro' a long Succession of Ages, whose *Line*, as the *Psalmist* expresses it, *goes out through all the Earth*, is Such a *Bond of Connection*, as cannot be *dissolv'd*; Each *Link* gives Force and Vigour to the other: Thus if We consider the *Word*

^a Rom. 10. 18.

of *Prophecy*, if We view it in its first *Dawnings*, in the visible *Applications* of *natural Causes*, in the gradual *Workings* of many Events, as well as in the *Guidance* and *Direction* of the divine Power animating and invigorating the whole System, Shall We say, that any Prediction loses its Strength of Evidence by the many intermediate Steps, which lead to its Completion? No! It strikes Us with more *Astonishment*, and more strongly declares the *Wisdom* of the whole Scheme of Providence, than if there had been but a short Interval between the *Prophecy* and its *Accomplishment*.

In the same Light, We may consider *Miracles*, those, that were wrought under the Jewish, and those under the Christian *Oeconomy*, as reciprocally confirming and ratifying each other. -- They proclaim the same *Finger of God*, the same Almighty Power, by which They were done, and are sensible Demonstrations of the *Divinity* of both Systems. -- The *Evidence*, as to the *Possibility* of the Facts, rises in proportion to the Number of Instances, in which those Facts were perform'd. *

a See *Hume's Essay on Miracles*.— It may not be improper to observe, that if *Miracles* had been only the *Production* of one *Age*, and exhibited only as a *Proof* of one *Dispensation*, this undoubtedly would have been matter of great *Triumph* to a modern Writer, who pretends, that *firm unalterable Experience* is the properest Test of the Truth of *Miracles*: --- But this
boasted

I might here enumerate many other Advantages arising from this *Progressive Plan* of reveal'd Religion, with regard to the *Messiah*, the *Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World*, with regard to the divine *Promises*, and the *Hopes and Comforts*, which were administer'd to the *Patriarchs*, the *Prophets*, and to all succeeding Ages; the *Gradation* is certainly striking, and declarative of that *Wisdom*, which is the *first Spring of Action in the Deity*; but I shall only conclude with this one Observation, that *moral Duties* are enforc'd under all the several Dispensations with the greatest Energy and Power, as the Glory and Perfection of all Religion. -- This is the Law and the *Prophets*, and such Injunctions so earnestly recommended, and nobly triumph-

boasted *Experience* is so far from being universal and uninterrupted, that We have undeniable Testimony, that the *Almighty* not only can, but often has overrul'd the *establish'd Laws* of Nature in Confirmation of the *Jewish* as well as the *Christian* System. --- The *Credibility* of the Facts is founded upon the strongest *Evidence*. such as none but the most sceptical and prejudic'd Minds can possibly deny. -- I know, that this Writer considers this, as *begging the Question*: But it is far from it, unless He could prove, that *Miracles* were absolutely *impossible*, that they involv'd a *Contradiction* in them, and that even God Himself could not counteract the uniform Course of Nature in any Instance whatsoever. -- This He has been vain enough to endeavour at, but all his Sophistry could not carry Him thro' it: The *Experience* of past Ages is so well attested, that his own Argument confronts Him; and not to allow God to have a *Dominion* over Nature is the highest Blasphemy and Profaneness.

ing

ing as it were above *Sacrifices* and all *external Duties*, are not only a Proof of their divine Authority, but greatly strengthen the Obligations of *Nature*, and render the *Light* of *Grace* superiour to all the *Dictates* of unassisted Reason.

But, 2^{ly}, not only the *Manner* of the divine *Manifestations*, but the *Time*, when the Gospel was promulg'd, is made the Subject of great Cavil.--“ If the Gospel was a System “ of Religion so beneficial to Mankind, why, “ says the Unbeliever, was the giving of those “ sacred *Oracles* deferr'd till the Days of *Ti-* “ *berius*, and, when given, why were they not “ made the standing Laws of all Nations ?”

How absurd and trifling are such Questions ? Does Man know the *Times and Seasons* better than the *All-wise God, who worketh all Things after the Counsel of his own Will* ? * The glorious *Harvest* of the Gospel could not come, before the *heavenly Seed* was ripen'd into Perfection : If *Christ* had made a more early Appearance in the World, the *Harmony* of the divine Oeconomy had been *disturb'd*, and indeed the whole *Structure* of it had been undermin'd. -- The Predictions of the Prophets must have pass'd away, as a *Shadow*, without their Accomplishment ; e-

a Eph. 1. 12.

specially those that were relative to the *Messiah*: The *Jewish Republick* was not as yet dissolv'd; The *Sceptre* had not departed from *Judah*; nor was the *Fullness of the Times of the Gentiles* come; Before the natural *Branches* were broken off, the wild *Olive-tree* could not be grafted in.^a

But, without a Reference to the prior Administrations of Providence, we may justly observe, that there was, at this Juncture, a peculiar Fitness and Propriety in the coming of our *Lord*, as the great *Preacher of Truth and Righteousness*. --- Now it was, that the *everlasting Gates* of the Kingdom of the *Messiah* open'd as of themselves; and the *Glad-tidings* of Salvation were proclaim'd with the greatest Advantage to *Man*, and Glory to *God*. -- The World was prepar'd for this great Event; Not only the *Jews*, but the *Romans*, and many of the *Eastern* Parts with lively Hopes foreboded some great *Deliverer*: Even Heathen *Historians*, *Suetonius* and *Tacitus*, have recorded this general Expectation: Such wonderful *Anticipations* so widely diffus'd among so many different Nations, may not improperly be called the *Harbingers of Christ*; and We may suppose, that Many, waiting for the great *Consolation*, were ready to cry out,

^a Rom. 11. 19.

Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord, Hosannah in the highest. *

There was at this Time a more than ordinary Necessity for the pure and heavenly Doctrines of the Gospel, to be a *Light to lighten the Gentiles*, and the *Glory of the People Israel*. -- The JEWS, by their vain Traditions, had made the *Commandments of God of none Effect*; and, by their *superstitious Formalities*, had almost lost sight of moral Obligations, though the *weightier Matters of the Law*: And among one Sect of them, the Doctrine of a *future State*, (tho' the grand *Hinge* of all Religion) was generally exploded.

Neither did the HEATHENS stand less in need of divine Instruction. -- Their Idolatry and Superstition had cast the thickest *Mist* over the best Principles of Nature; tho' in *Words* They *believ'd a God*, yet in reality They *deny'd Him*: When such *Clouds* of Darkness had *overspread* the World, how necessary was it for the *Sun of Righteousness to arise with Healing in his Wings?*

At this Time the Gospel met with a happy Coincidence of Circumstances, which greatly favour'd its Admission, and Such as no other *Period* could probably furnish.

a. Mark 11. 9.

Suppose it had been granted in the early Ages of the World. -- A *written Revelation*, before the Use of *Letters* was invented? how absurd!

Date its Origin a little lower, when *Egypt* was in its most flourishing State. -- But what ill *Repositories* must the Egyptian *Hieroglyphicks* have been for those sacred Oracles? And how averse must the *Genius* of that People, immers'd in the lowest Dregs of Idolatry, have been to the *Simplicity of the Gospel*?

Perhaps it may be said, that the most flourishing *Times* of the *Grecian Empire* would have been better adapted for this divine Purpose. -- But surely the *Pride of Greece* would never have stoop'd to the humble Doctrines of the *Cross*: *Greece* was the Mart for Philosophy, Government, and all Arts and Sciences; Can it be thought, that, They, who figur'd so highly in the *Republick of Letters*, would have condescended to be taught by any *Wisdom* but their own? Indeed *Truth* and *Learning* are *Friends*; but that *Knowledge*, which puffeth up, disdains Instruction, and is too wise to be reform'd.

What if the early *Times* of the *Roman Empire* had been made the *Vehicles* of divine Knowledge? Here likewise many invincible Objections occur, -- I shall only observe, that
a Nation

a Nation devoted to Arms, and carry'd away with a Thirst of Glory and Conquest, would certainly have despis'd the *Gospel of Peace*.

At that Juncture indeed, when the *holy Authour* of our Religion enter'd upon the publick Office of his Ministry, He was to the *Jews* a *stumbling Block*, and to the *Gentiles* *Foolishness*; but his heavenly Doctrines soon emerg'd, like *Light*, out of *Darkness*, and forc'd their Way thro' all Opposition; in less than forty Years thro' many Parts both of the *East* and *West*; thro' all the *civiliz'd*, and most of the *barbarous*, *Provinces of Asia*; thro' *Scythia*, *India*, *Gaul*, and *Egypt*; and especially in *Rome*, the great *Metropolis* of the *World*, the Name of *Jesus* had been *heard* and embrac'd with *Gladness* and *Singleness of Heart*.

And here We must observe, that there were many *natural Causes*, which happily contributed to this wonderful Success. -- *Arts* and *Sciences* flourish'd in their highest Perfection. -- The old *Roman Rusticity* was in a great Measure worn off; An *Elegance of Taste*, and a *Politeness* of Manners, succeeded. -- It is easy to see, that these *Refinements* might occasionally engage some Attention to the *Gospel*; The *Learning* of this Age was indeed at first a great Obstacle to its Success; but, as soon as It submitted to a free and impartial

partial Scrutiny, It could no longer resist the Force and Power of Truth ; The same *Weapon*, which at first was lifted up against the Religion of Jesus, did afterwards become its able and powerful Support. -- Under such Protection, and by the joint Aid of the *Spirit of God*, the *Gospel went forth and prosper'd*.

The *Sweets of Peace* were now enjoy'd both in *Europe* and in *Asia*. -- The *new Religion*, instead of being lost in the Din of Arms, found Men at leisure to make a liberal Enquiry into its Doctrines ; The *Soil* was soft and delicate ; and the divine *Seed*, tho' often choak'd with *Tares* and *Weeds*, sprung up, and brought forth *Fruit abundantly*.

Trade and *Commerce* extended their Branches far and wide. -- There was a vast and extensive Intercourse between the most distant Provinces in *Europe*, *Asia* and *Africa*. -- Such a free Communication, between the most populous Places in the World, could not but greatly quicken the Progress of the Gospel ; like the *Flame of Heaven* itself, it flew with *Rapidity* from one End of the Earth to the other.

Our Adversaries indeed do most of them allow, that the Gospel grew mightily and prevail'd ; but, if it came from God, say They,
 " why

“ why was it not made the standing Religion
 “ of all the Nations of the World without
 “ Exception ?”

But let it be observ'd, that such an universal Establishment was not in its Nature possible, nor *absolutely necessary*.

Not *possible*, I mean, in the ordinary Course of Providence, without a *perpetual Miracle*.-- God indeed, by *internal Revelation*, might infuse into the Minds of all Men an *irresistible* Knowledge of all Truth, both divine and human. But would such a Procedure be consistent with his Dealings with the Children of Men, as rational and free *Agents* ? It would be totally subversive of their *Freedom*, and consequently, of all *Morality*, and all *Religion*.

Nor was it *absolutely necessary*, that all Men should be infallibly inspir'd and *taught of God*. -- For the Benefits of Christ's *Death* were not *partial*, but *universal*; not only extending to Those, who have been bless'd with the *Light* of his Gospel, but to Those, who still sit in *Ignorance and Darknes* : -- What is the full Extent of this great *Propitiation*, and how far it will reach to those, who never heard of the *Name of Christ*, is indeed a Mystery, *within the Veil*; neither known to Us, nor to *Angels themselves*, tho' *desirous of looking*
 ing

ing into it : But the Time will come, when the Administrations of divine Providence will be unveil'd ; when We shall behold the Glories and Triumphs of the Gospel in their full Splendour ; when both *Jews* and *Gentiles* shall be called in ; and the *Knowledge of the Lord* shall cover the Earth, even as the Waters cover the Sea. ^a

But 3^{ly}, The Infidel thinks, He has another *Strong-hold* ; He represents the Gospel in its *Effects* as productive of more harm than good to Mankind. -- “ What in most Places, “ says a late Writer, *passes for the Christian Religion, (if not the chiefest Part of it) has “ transform’d this social benign Creature into “ one fierce and cruel ; and made him act with “ such Rage and Fury against those, who never “ did, nor design’d him any Injury, as could “ not have enter’d into the Hearts of Men to “ conceive, even tho’ They were in the unavoidable State of Degeneracy and Corruption.* ”

The Malice of Man could not have invented a greater Scandal, nor a more unjust one.-- Good God ! Cruelty lay’d at the Door of Christianity ! We may as well suppose *Satan*, the great Destroyer of Mankind, to be a pure Spirit of unmix’d *Benevolence*.

^a If. 11. 9.

^b See Christianity as old as the Creation. p. 405.

If *Christians* and *Heathens* are to be compar'd, from whence are We to take our *Estimate*? from their respective *Principles* or *Practices*? -- If from their *Principles*, how great an Advantage has the Christian? He has not only the same instinctive Impressions of *Humanity*, but the tender *Feelings* of *Nature* are render'd more pure, more benign and gentle by the sweet Influences of the Gospel. -- In this Religion, there is so far from being the least Tincture of any thing, that is *earthly, sensual, devilish*, that it is the *true Wisdom from above, first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without partiality, and without Hypocrisy.* *

But perhaps the Objector rather chooses to draw his Comparison from the real Actions of *Christians* and *Heathens*; and no doubt, he will endeavour to blacken his Account with a long Train of Cruelties on one side, and brighten it with a Description of the most noble and heroic Virtues on the other: By these unfair Methods, by setting the vilest Actions of some Christians, (the horrid Fruits of Superstition,) in an opposite Light to the most illustrious Exploits of some Heathens, the *Scale* must certainly turn in

a James 3. 14.

E

favour

favour of the latter ; but to form a true Rule of Judgment, weigh Matters in an equal Balance ; distinguish between *nominal* and *real* Christians, between the true and sincere Followers of Christ, and the *Corrupters* of his *Word and Doctrine*.

Such a fair and impartial View will soon demonstrate that Christians as much excel in the *Uprightness* of their Morals, as in the Purity of their Principles : It must indeed be own'd, that the *sacred Name* of Christ has, in many Instances, been made use of as a *Cloke of Maliciousness* ;--Many have been hurried on by a fiery Zeal to think, that they did *God Service*, even when they trampled upon the Laws of Humanity.--Of the Truth of this, the Sanguinary Practices of superstitious Zealots in the *Church of Rome* will always remain as an undeniable Testimony. -- But where is the Fault ? not in the Religion of *Jesus*, but in the *Perversion* of it ; The best Things are capable of Abuse ; the Lusts and Passions of Men will sometimes bear Sway ; but let Christianity have it due Influence, and all its Productions will be sweet and amiable ; *Mercy and Truth will meet together, Righteousness and Peace will kiss each other*.

Having

Having thus with close Footsteps pursu'd
the Unbeliever thro' his various Turnings,
nothing now remains but to adapt the Ap-
plication of the whole to this *grand Fes-
tival*.

First then, this holy *Solemnity* should put
us in mind of the Wisdom and Goodness of
Almighty God in forming the gracious *Plan*
of Man's Redemption; that wonderful and
extensive *Plan*, which reaches from the first
Foundation of the World thro' a long Suc-
cession of Ages, and is carry'd on by the di-
vine Counsels with Order, Harmony, and
Connexion. -- The *Wisdom* of Heaven is be-
yond the utmost Stretch of human Imagina-
tion; She *reaches*, says *Solomon*, *from one End*
to another mightily, and sweetly does She order
all Things. -- Thus is *She justified of all her*
Children. *

The *Testimony of the Lord* is every where;
there is no *Chasm*, no *Blank* in the Scheme
of Providence. -- There is one continu'd Se-
ries; and each Step of the grand Oeconomy
advances with such a peculiar Beauty, and
such a wonderful *Propriety*, as sends up the
sweetest *Incense* to the Throne of Grace.

How happy is it for Us, that We enjoy
the Benefits of reveal'd Religion, not in its

first *Outlines*, but in the full Extent and *Exuberance* of *Grace* and *Truth*, which were given to former Ages, as it were, *drop* by *drop*, but are pour'd out upon Us in the most plentiful Effusions by the coming of Christ Jesus?

2ly, We are at this Time call'd upon in a particular Manner to commemorate the *Love of Christ*, which *passes Knowledge*; to adore his infinite Mercy and Goodness, who took Compassion upon lost Sinners; who left the Adoration of *Angels* and *Archangels*, and even the *Bosom* of his heavenly Father, to come down in the *Fullness of Time*, and, according to the *predeterminate Counsel of God*, to dwell among Men, not in the Form of an Earthly Prince, but that of a *Servant*; not to receive the Honours and Glories of this World, but to do the *Will of God*; to bear the *Contradiction of Sinners* both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, to become poor to make Us rich, and at last to offer up his most pretious Blood upon the *Cross* for the Salvation of Mankind. -- This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all Acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners. *

3ly, and Lastly, If We love Christ, let Us keep his Commandments. -- This is the surest

Test of a Christian Faith, and the best Means of promoting the Interest of the Gospel, as well as our own private Happiness.

The bad Lives of Christians are the favourite Topicks of Reproach among Unbelievers. When their fallacious Reasonings are expos'd; when They are stripp'd of their false Disguises, and *that cunning Craftiness, whereby they lye in wait to deceive*; and when the Gospel is fully prov'd and establish'd by the fairest and strongest Deductions of Reason; they then fly to *ridicule* as their last Refuge, and think to atone for their Want of Argument by the keenest Edge of *Satirical Reflection* upon the Lives and Actions of *Christians*.

The first Christian *Apologists* were sensible of this; They constantly appeal'd, before *Magistrates* and *Emperours* themselves, to the Purity and Sanctity of their Manners. -- It was their conscious *Innocence*, that supported them under all Difficulties and Dangers, and disarm'd the Malice of their Enemies, by *confuting* their Arguments, *convincing* their Understandings, and sometimes *converting* their Hearts.

In defence therefore of this our holy Religion, Let us put on the same *Shield of Faith* and the same *Breastplate of Righteousness*. --

For

For the *Weapons of our Warfare* are not *carnal*: Then shall We advance the Glory of Christ's Kingdom; We shall give no Occasion to our *Enemies* to *blaspheme*; and, if We are not so happy as to put to *silence* the *Ignorance of Foolish Men*, and to turn *them to Righteousness*, yet our *Labour of Love* will not *be forgotten*; and We shall obtain the highest Blessing of all others, even the Salvation of our own *Souls*.

Which that We may all obtain God of his infinite Mercy grant through Jesus Christ our Lord.

7 JU 66

BOOKS Printed for JAMES FLETCHER in
the *Turl*, *Oxon*; and Sold by J. FLETCHER
in *St. Paul's Church-Yard*, *London*.

THE Works of the Right Reverend Father in
God George Hooper D.D. late Lord Bishop
of Bath and Wells.

The Life and Remains of Ralph Bathurst M.D.
Dean of Wells, and President of Trinity College in
Oxford, by Tho. Warton M.A. Fellow of Trinity
College, and Professor of Poetry.

Observations on the Faerie Queen of Spenser, by
Tho. Warton M.A. A new Edit. in 2 Vol.

Aristotelis Liber de Rhetorica Gr. cum Notis,
Editio nova.

Aristotelis Liber de Poetica Græce, cum Inter-
pretatio nova Latina & Notis.

Xenophontis Memorabilium Socratis Dictorum
Lib. IV, cum Notis H. Stephani, Leunclavii, Æ.
Porti & Ernesti. Recensuit suisque Annotationibus
auxit Bolton Simpson D.D. Editio Tertia.

Platonis Dialogi V, Gr. Lat. Recensuit Notisque
illustravit Nath. Forster S.T.P. C.C.C. Socius.

Biblia Hebraica sine Punctis. Accurante Nath.
Forster S.T.P. C.C.C. Socio.

A Dissertation upon the Account suppos'd to be
given of Jesus Christ by Josephus, being an At-
tempt to shew that this celebrated Passage, some
slight Corruptions only excepted, may reasonably
be esteem'd Genuine.

The

BOOKS Printed for JAMES KNECHTER in
the New Oxon; and Sold by J. KNECHTER
**The Genuineness of Lord Clarendon's History of
the Rebellion, printed at Oxford, vindicated, Mr.
Oldmixon's Slander confuted; and the true State of
the Case represented, by John Burton D.D. Fellow
of Eton College.**

**Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity from
the Exceptions of a Pamphlet entitul'd, an Essay on
Spirit &c. in three Parts, with an Appendix, by
Thomas Randolph D.D. President of C.C.C. Oxon.**

**The Gospel Credibility defended against the Ob-
jection of its Decrease by Length of Time. A Ser-
mon preach'd before the University of Oxford at
St. Mary's, on Sunday, July 4. 1756, by Charles
Hall D.D. Fellow of Corpus Christi College.**

**The Alliance of Religion and Learning confi-
der'd. A Sermon preach'd before the Right Ho-
nourable John Earl of Westmorland, Chancellor,
and the University of Oxford at St. Mary's, on Aft
Sunday, July 8. 1759, by Benjamin Buckler D.D.
Fellow of All-Soul's College.**

**The Scripture Doctrine of Predestination stated
and explain'd. Two Discourses preach'd before the
University of Oxford at St. Mary's, on June 18.
1758, by William Parker D.D. Chaplain inordi-
nary to his Majesty; and F.R.S.**

**The Scripture Prophecies consider'd—and com-
par'd with the Oracles of the Heathens. A Sermon
preached before the University of Oxford, at St.
Mary's, on Sunday, Aug. 2. 1761, by John Raw-
lins M.A.**

20